



AIA
New York

November 12, 2015

Chair Meenakshi Srinivasan
Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th floor
New York NY 10007

Re: Edgar J. Kaufmann Conference Rooms, 809 United Nations Plaza

Dear Chair Srinivasan,

On behalf of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and its more than 5,200 registered architects and associated design and construction professional members, we are writing to express our strong support for the designation of the Edgar J. Kaufmann Conference Rooms, designed by Alvar Aalto, Hon. FAIA, as an interior landmark. As we originally stated in our 2002 letter in support of this designation, this series of rooms and their original furnishings are a unique architectural treasure which should be designated a landmark to ensure that they will be maintained and accessible to the public for years to come.

The American Institute of Architects

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Alvar Aalto is widely recognized as one of the world's greatest masters of twentieth century architecture. In 1963, the American Institute of Architects awarded him the AIA Gold Medal, the highest honor it confers on an architect, in recognition of a significant body of work of lasting influence on the theory and practice of architecture. Built in 1964, the Edgar J. Kaufmann Conference Rooms are the only surviving work designed by Aalto in New York City and are among only four extant projects designed by Aalto remaining in the entire United States.

We are fortunate that the spaces have been well preserved and largely retain their original integrity. Notable aspects of Aalto's design include an undulating plaster ceiling, ash wood wall panels with vertical birch battens, ash window louvers, cobalt blue porcelain tile, custom copper lighting fixtures, seating and lectern designed by Aalto, and a sculptural group of bent wood elements providing a focal point. The forms and materials of the Institute of International Education are representative of Aalto's late work and clearly exemplify his distinctive approach.

The Kaufmann Conference Rooms are not only significant by virtue of the immense stature of their architect but also because of the patronage that made them possible. They were envisioned and commissioned by the eminent architectural historian and curator Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr. in honor of his late father, the Pittsburgh department store magnate who was the client for both Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and Richard Neutra's Kaufmann Desert House, two of the most iconic American houses ever constructed.

This unique treasure must be protected. Since they were created, these rooms have frequently been accessible to the public, and we hope they will continue to be. We strongly urge the Commission to designate the Edgar J. Kaufmann Conference Rooms.

Sincerely,

John Arbuckle, Assoc. AIA
AIANY Historic Buildings Committee